Rites of Passage: An Aspect of Rai Culture

Sueyoshi Toba

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ROYAL NEPAL ACADEMY

RITES OF PASSAGE
AN ASPECT OF RAI CULTURE

Sueyoshi Toba

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Foreword

Mr. Sueyoshi Toba is primarily a linguist and has earned a name for himself as a Nepalwala in his country Japan with his writings on some Rai languages of eastern Nepal. He has widened his anthropological interest to study rites of passages prevalent among various Rai groups. The result is the present work, a preliminary report, though, it is "intended", as he says, "for the general reader who has not been initiated into the technical intricacies of the anthropological vocabulary." The report, a slim volume of about 60 pages (with a bibliography), is based on the field studies in the Rai areas Mr. Toba undertook from time to time in the past. The concepts he has tried to develop with the needed framework to buttress them are heavily drawn upon findings of previous scholars engaged in related studies. Mr. Toba's views may also raise quite a few controvesies, but considering that what he has attempted at is just a pioneer venture, in future he would undertake deeper studies with wider research in the field.

The Royal Nepal Academy is happy that it was of some assistance to Mr. Toba with the research fellowship it offered him for the study presented. It is hoped that it will be well received by the academics devoted to anthropological studies which provides a vast, raw and fascinating field in Nepal. Mr. Toba writes in a lucid and readable style and so the present publication would be of interest to the expert and layman alike.

Isvar Baral
Vice-Chancellor,
Royal Nepal Academy

3-6-1992

Preface

When we look at our country, focussing on the various languages and cultures, we cannot but marvel at our riches in spite of the small size. It is, however, the need of the hour to preserve and develop each one of these languages and cultures in order to preserve them and show our respect and appreciation for this our heritage.

In this connection, the Royal Nepal Academy must be given credit for taking a step in the right direction. The Royal Nepal Academy sponsored a research programme in 1986 to Sueyoshi Toba, the author of this small volume which contains the result of cultural studies undertaken by the author.

Mr. Toba visited many Rai villages in the area between the Arun Kosi in the east and the Tamba Kosi in the west collecting data pertaining to customs and rituals of the life cycle. The description of his discoveries show that the author writes from an insider's point of view.

Mr. Toba came to Nepal first in 1970 and fell in love with this beautiful and peaceful couutry. He began learning Nepali and other languages spokan in Nepal, as well as undertaking studies of literature and culture. The result of this research was published by the Japan-Nepal Society and by the Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies. Publications include works on Nepali as well as other languages spoken in east Nepal, notably Rai languages, especially Khaling Rai which is spoken in Solu Khumbu district of Sagarmatha Zone. At present, Mr. Toba is a research fellow under the Tribhuvan University Ph. D. programme. Since he is a linguist, he is working on a descriptive grammar and dictionary of the Khaling Rai language.

We hope that in the future also we can cxpect publications from this Japanese friend of Nepalese languages and cultures.

Vairagi Kainla
Member
Royal Nepal Academy

Baisakh Purnima
16th May, 1992

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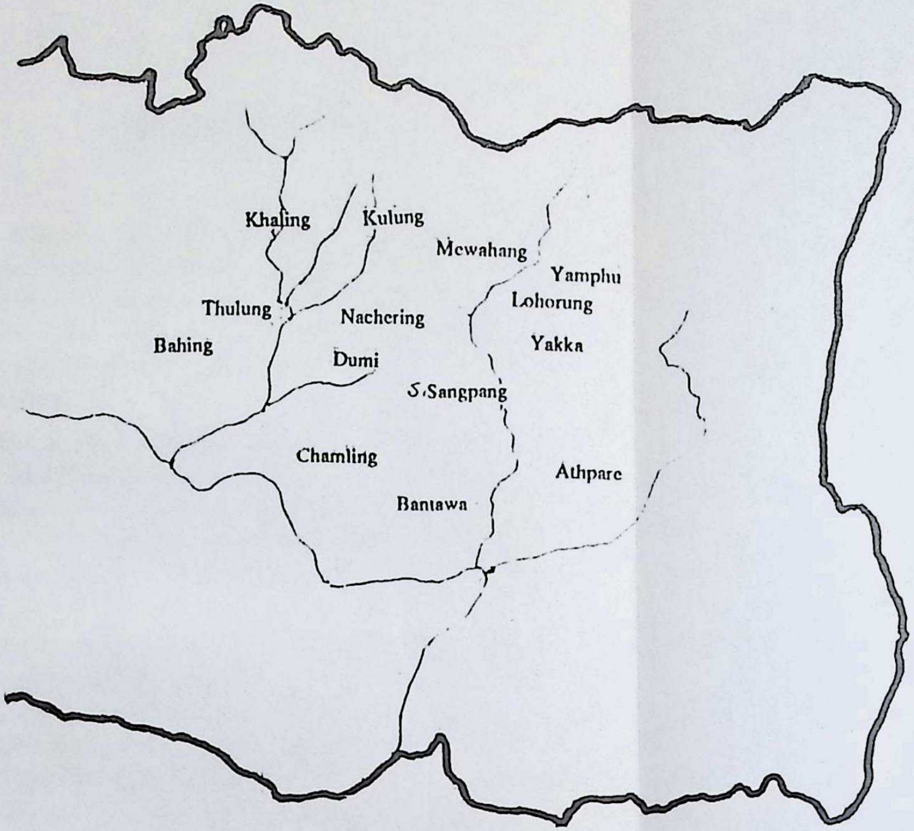
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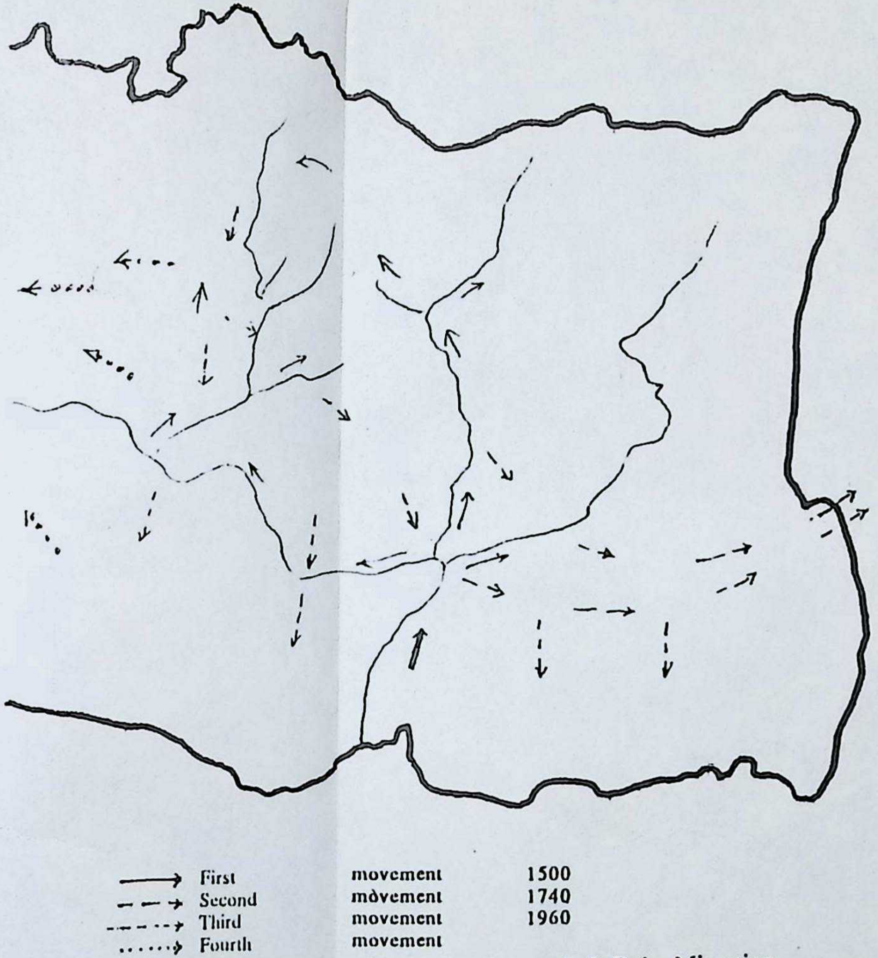
Bantawa

A 1 Rai Location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A 2 Rai Migration

Acknowledgements

This study has been carried out under the auspices of the Royal Nepal Academy. I received very helpful guidance from former Chancellor Lain Singh Bangdel of the RNA, for which I am grateful. Without his enthusiastic support and encouragement this one year project could not have been completed

Many other scholars showed interest in this work. I am indebted to Dr. Navin K. Rai for his help when I began my work on this research project. Dr. D R. Dahal and Dr D. B. Bista also made valuable suggestions. Dr. Novel K. Rai was generous with his knowledge of the Bantawa Rai culture.

On my first field trip Mr. Nathanael Khaling accompanied me and was of great assistance. Mr. Bishnu Bhakta Rai and Mr. Mani Kumar Rai, who were the then Pradhan Panchas of Basa and Kanku villages respectively, were helpful during my stay in their villages. While collecting data, both Mr. Chandra Rai and Mr. Shiva Rai were patient in answering all my questions. Mr. Amrit Rai and Mr. Ajirman Rai supplied me with information about other aspects of Rai culture. Many other people also extended their kind help so that my second field trip was as smooth as my first one.

This preliminary report is inteded for the general reader who has not been initiated into the technical intricacies of the anthropological vocabulary. While I have

made free use of the information generously shared by anthropologists and other scholars, they are, of course, in no way responsible for any simplification of their data, or for the conclusions I have drawn. The responsibility for any errors of fact must rest with the author.

Last, but not least, my wife, Ingrid, has been an able critic, and she also typed a part of my first draft. Without her help this report could not be as complete as it is. I am thankful to her.

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 General Remarks

The Kingdom of Nepal has a rich heritage of diverse ethnic groups. In the hills of eastern Nepal are a people of Mongoloid origin called the Rai. They speak several mutually unintelligible languages belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Their neighbours to the west are the Sunwar and to the east, the Limbu. The Rais are ethnically closely related to both.

A number of anthropologists have done field-work among one or the other of the Rai sub-groups and the results of their research have been published[1]. The focus of most of these publications has been on the economic, political, psychological, and religious aspects of Rai culture, paying less attention to the Rai life cycle and its place in the overall cultural context. The present paper tries to fill this gap, dealing especially with the rites of passage of various Rai groups[2].

Rites of passage are ceremonial events, existing in all known societies. They mark the passage from one social or religious status to another. Rites of passage are the universal aspect of all cultures. This study focuses on the crises of life, namely birth, marriage, and death. All of these events bring about changes in an individual's social status and therefore, in the social relationships of the people concerned.

The French anthropologist and folklorist Van Gennep (1909) has developed a classification system describing the functions of rites of passage. He explains these rites as the means by which individuals are eased, without social disruption, through the difficulties of transition from one social status to another. On the basis of an extensive survey of many societies, Van Gennep held that these rites consist of three distinguishable elements. He calls these three stages 'separation', 'transition', and 'reincorporation'. The people on whom the rites center are first symbolically separated from their old status. Then they undergo adjustment to the new status during the period of transition. Finally they are reincorporated in society in their new status. Although the most commonly observed rites relate to crises in the life cycle, Van Gennep saw the significance of the ceremonies in being social or cultural. Rites of passage celebrate events primarily for their socio-cultural importance, rather than for their biological nature.

1.2 Notes on Field Visits

The author of this paper lived in a Khaling Rai village for several years during which time he had the opportunity to observe the daily life of the people in close proximity, as well as participate in daily village activities. As I learned the local language, I became friends with the village people and they freely shared their opinions and thoughts on life with me. During the stay in the village, I also met other Rai from the surrounding areas and visited Thulung, Kulung, and Bahing Rai in the surrounding Khaling Rai area. Certain differences in their speech as well as customs were quite obvious. Thus an interest in Rai culture as a whole grew in me, and for some time I hoped to do more comprehensive research in this field. Opportunity for this came under the auspices of the Royal Nepal Academy and

I was able to enter into a new phase of field work. This time, I equipped myself with a systematic questionaire for systematic information. Of course, I also studied previous research work on the Rai's to get ideas about what to look for.

I undertook my first field trip after the Hindu festival of Dasain in November of 1985. A Rai friend accompanied me as we criss-crossed the area north-west of the Arun river around Tumlingtar for three weeks on foot. First we stayed at a Newahang village at the head of the Sankhuwa river where we were able to observe several religious rites. The village people were very friendly and readily answered our questions in Nepali. Their way of life as compared to other Rais looked quite simple. For example, they still use the traditional bamboo cylinders to carry water to their houses from the nearest stream, whereas other Rais might use a centrally located water tank and carry water in copper or aluminium vessels either bought or made to order. Our next stop was in the Kulung Rai area, where I made short visits to almost all Kulung villages along the Hongu river (east of the Dudh Koshi). The Kulungs live in an isolated area and have retained their language; however, as compared to earlier visits, the proficiency in Nepali had also improved considerably. When I first visited the Kulungs in 1970, we needed an interpreter to communicate with them. In 1985, however, many Kulung Rai were able to converse in Nepali. We heard an interesting story relating to their migration to their present place of residence while we were there.

After leaving the Kulung Rai, we proceeded to the Khaling Rai village where I had lived previously. Here I noticed a number of changes. The villagers have, on their own initiative, built a school outside the village center. The number of children (including a large number of girls) who regularly attend school has grown considerably. In the village itself, there is now a health post manned by a trained health worker. Drinking water supply has been improved with a centrally located tank which was rebuilt by the villagers after landslides had destroyed it. Overall, the people enjoy a better life now than before. However, their life style in general, their attitudes, and their thinking have not changed at all and I felt as though I was observing a traditiional Rai community.

The second field trip was made during winter, the season of weddings, and I was in fact able to observe a wedding ceremony in a Khaling village. After that, we walked southward, touching some Chamling villages as well as a Bahing village. In the latter we met an old man who told us another migration story regarding the wanderings of Bahing, Hayu, and Sunwar people.

1.3 The Origin of the Name 'Rai'

Bista (1967:32) states that 'Rai is technically a term meaning "headman", but has over the years become the popular generic term of reference for an entire ethnic group'. Locally, non-Rai also use the term 'Jimi', or 'Jimidar', or, rarely, 'Khambu', though the latter is mostly limited to ethnographic literature.

From historical evidence, it is suggested that the term 'Rai' originated when Prithvi Narayan Shah appointed local Kirati[3] headmen to act as intermediaries between the local people and the government. These headmen were given royal commissions and the honorific title 'Rai' (McDougal, 1979:8). Gradually this title became the accepted generic term for the whole group of people.

It is interesting to note that it is due to this relatively new designation 'Rai', that various groups became aware of their ethnic identity and all the members of these groups now use the designation 'Rai' as their surname. There are a few exceptions to this usage in that some Rai now use their clan names for their surnames. This is especially popular among the Rais living in the Darjeeling area, that is, outside of the traditional Rai area. So we find among the Darjeeling Rais name likes K. P. Thulung, D. B. Khaling, G. B. Bantawa, etc. And so, when people use their clan names, their Rai identity is further stressed.

1.4 Two Theories concerning Rai Tribal Identity

The term 'tribe' is often thought of as referring to 'primitive' and 'backward' people, but in the strict sense of the word, this is not true. A broad dictionary definition calls a tribe a group of people united by race and customs under the same leaders. Anthropologists, however, use the term in a more narrow meaning. In this paper we shall follow the anthropological usage of the term, although there is no real agreement as to the exact meaning.

'A Rai tribe will be defined as the largest segment of the Rai population speaking a common language readily intelligible to all its members'. (McDougal 1979:13–14). McDougal also asserts that the Rais are not a single tribe because of the variation in language, but rather a collection of tribes exhibiting among themselves differences in language, culture, and social organization, although at the same time they do share a common cultural base and have similar social structures. Thus, according to this theory, the Athpaharia, Bahing, Bantawa, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, Lohorung, Mewahang, Thulung, Yakka, and Yamphu Rai are all different tribes on the basis of their linguistic differences (see Appendix).

Allen (1980:1) sees the same group of people quite differently when he writes : 'The Rais are a division of the Kirati peoples who live in the middle hills of East Nepal and the Thulung are one among more than a dozen sub-tribes, each defined by a distinct language'. This theory defines the various Rai groups as sub-tribes within a tribe as a whole.

1.5 Some Characteristics of the Rai

1.5.1 Physical appearence

The Rais are a people of mongoloid stock, as Professor Nesturkh (1966: 26) states :

> 'Among the specific features of the many anthropological types of this race are the following : a broad face that projects moderately, the broad, projecting cheekbones giving it a flat appearance, the eyes are brown, the eye slit is medium in the majority but narrow in many cases; in some individuals external angle of the eye is disposed higher than the internal angle; there is a well-developed fold on the upper eyelid that in many cases extends to the cilia and crosses the lower lid, completely or partially covering the internal angel of the eye, including the lacrimal bay, to form the epicanthus; the nose is of medium width, slightly projecting and usually with a low bridge; in the majority of cases the nostrils are in the medium with their long axes at an angle of about 90 degree to each other : the lips are thin or medium; ... the chin ridge has medium development; in very many individuals the head is mesocephalous. The skin is lighter in colour and the hair is black and not always stiff, the beard is scanty.'

This is a good description of the appearance of the Rais. To add to the above, one can say their physical height is medium and their body is also of medium build. Since most Rais have spend their lives in mountains, the muscles of the legs are usually well developed. The Rais also exhibit the slight bow-leggedness characteristic of mountain people.

1.5.2 Disposition

The Rais are characterized by a positive and open attitude towards life. When they want to do something they do it without hesitation. This does not mean that they are lawless, but they show a free man's behaviour in all their actions. In the recent past some Rais had also been nominated as members of the National Panchayat. The Rais are an intelligent people, and this intelligence is usually expressed in a practical rather than a philosophical approach to life. According to Northy (1974:24), the Rais as a people are brave and courageous. Young Rai men have proved their worth in the armed services of Britain, India, and Nepal. They serve their time with distinction and are not infrequently promoted to higher ranks.

The Rais are well-mannered, cheerful and amicable. When intoxicated, however, they, like people of all races, do not feel the pressures of social control, and aggressive behaviour may be manifest. The Rais are honest and generous. Their generosity is especially evident in their willingness to share food and drink. Their sense of humour, which is well-developed, is also reflected in their interactions with other people.

1.6 Unity in Diversity

No matter how one defines a 'tribe', there are many ethnic groups among the Rais. At least ten separate groups of Rais can be isolated according to their languages. Smallet groups tend to shelter under larger ones. This fact may account for the occasional confusion about a tribal name. Each of the linguistically distinct tribes of the Rais also carries a definite cultural distintion. However, these distinctions are beginning to disappear, starting with the traditional way of dress, and progressing to language use. As the Rais mingle more with the Nepali speaking people, besides the Rai themselves, they have to use the national language, Nepali, if they want to communicate with each other. And yet with all their differences and even in their loss of cultural distinction in favour of common Nepali dress, etc., they are known as the Rais. Integration into national life through wider contact with the national culture is rapidly progressing. Some Rai no longer insist on their distinction as a sub-group, but emphasize and accept only the fact that they are 'Rai'.

In this paper we are concerned with the general unity of all the Rais. We want to see a general picture of Rai culture through observation of the rites of passage. We want to see the forest as a whole and not the individual trees only. This approach frames the following chapters[4].

□

Chapter 2

Physical and Historical Settings

2.1 Geographical Setting

The Rais live in hills of eastern Nepal, north of the Mahabharat range and south of the Himalayan range. The east-west extension of their area stretches between the Tamur and the Rikhu rivers. Rai houses and villages are usually found at an altitude of 600 metres at the lowest, and 2400 meters at the highest. Below and around the Rai live various other Nepalese groups, and above them, at higher elevations dwell the Sherpas (see map A. 1).

Traditionally, eastern Nepal has been divided from the west to the east into 'Near Kirat' from the Sunkoshi to the Likhu river; 'Middle Kirat' between the Likhu and the Arun; 'Far Kirat' from the Arun to the Nepal border. Nowadays the administrative divisions are the Zones, and the Rais live in Janakpur, Sagarmatha, Koshi, and Mechi Zones from the west to the east. The main Rai population is congregated in Sagarmatha and Koshi Zones, but some Rais also live in Mechi Zone and beyond the borders in Darjeeling, Sikkim, Bhutan as well as in Assam and even in Nagaland.

2.2 Migration History

Rai oral tradition tells us that their ancestors came to their present area of settlement in eastern Nepal through the Barahkshetra gorge of the Koshi river (see map A. 2). According to one version there were three brothers. Once through the gorge, the brothers separated, each taking his followers, and set out independently. They trekked up the different river valleys and settled in the Sunkoshi, the Dudh Koshi and the Arun valleys. The Khalings say that they came through Paac Pokhari at the foot of the Himalayas after leaving the Arun[5]. The Thulungs came by a different route[6].

In this century, the Rais began to migrating eastwards as the British government began recruiting soldiers from among the Nepa'i hill peoples. (One such recruitment centre was in Dharan, which is actually east of most of the Rai population areas. A population explosion among the Rais caused some to move into the lowlands of the Terai. The government encouraged prospective settlers so that today a fair number of Rais live on newly cultivated lands in the Terai. Since work for unskilled but hard-working labourers was readily available in the hill areas of West Bengal in India, many young Rai people migrated there as well. Some Rais also live in the Nagaland and Manipur states of India.

As yet no accurate information regarding these migrations is available apart from oral traditions. But we can deduce from linguistic evidence that the first group of of Rais came to eastern Nepal and that the groups had separated around 1500 years ago[7]. The recent eastward movement began around the turn of the century, while the southward migration - the latest - began as recently as the late 1950's when malaria was eradicated in the Terai region.

2.3 Present Location of Various Rai Groups

'The Rais are not a tribe', according to McDougal (1979 : 12), 'but rather a collection of tribes exhibiting among themselves differences in language, culture and social organization, although they do share a common cultural base and have similar social structures.' Even though the Rai refer to themselves as 'Das Kirati', there are more than ten Rai tribes, the exact number differing according to the way of classification. A linguistic classification yields the following names[8].

Sagarmatha Zone		Koshi Zone	
Khaling	Kulung	Mewahang	Lohorung
Thulung	Dumi-Koi	Yamphu	Yakka
Bahing	Tilung	Bantawa	Athpaharia
Umbule	Chamling		
Sangpang			

Location of Rai Groups
Figure 1

Figure 1 shows the location of various Rai groups in the Sagarmatha and the Koshi Zones. Rai also live in the Mechi Zone; the gropps dwelling there have immigrated from Sagarmatha and Koshi Zones.

2.4 Linguistic Situation

There is a saying that there are as many Rai languages as there are Rai. Are these different 'languages' really languages or are they not rather dialects, that is, variations of one language ? Formerly from a political point of view it was considered undesirable to use the term 'language', but rather to refer to them as dialects[9]. From the linguistic point of view, however, because of the confirmed mutual unintelligibility of the various Rai speech varieties, we must consider them Rai languages and not dialects. With this in mind, we find fourteen different languages being spoken among the Rais. According to His Majesty's Government 1981 Census Report on Population there are 221,353 mother-tongue speakers of Rai languages, No breakdown of population according to language is available. The Nepali acts as the language or trade and means of communication between the various Rai groups.

Rai languages are related to the Limbu and the Sunwar, the neighbouring languages to the east and west. Together with the Hayu, another language in the area, all these languages comprise a language group commonly called the Kirati language group. This group shares one especial feature in that verbs take an affix resembling the pronoun of subject or object depending on the sentence structure. There is, however, a great deal of variation in the manifestation of this common feature in these languages. Another commonly shared point is lexical similarity, that is, a fair number of words are very similar in all these Kirati languages (e. g. the word for 'eye' is /mi/ or its variations, 'stone' is /lung/ or its variations, and such is the case with other common words).

None of the Kirati languages except Limbu has been rendered in writing until recently. The Limbu script has been used in their literature. Even today it is taught at schools in Sikkim. Within the past twenty years both Nepalese and foreign scholars have worked on various Kirati languages and produced books on grammar and vocabularies (dictionaries). Notable examples of such work are available for the Bantawa, Khaling, Kulung and Thulung Rai languages. A comparative linguistic study on Rai languages is being carried out by the linguists of the Linguistic Survey of Nepal, Moreover, a number of oral traditions have been recorded and analyzed as well,

2.5 Religious Background

The Rais practice a religion of their own which is neither Hindu nor Buddhist although at some places their influence can be felt, notably where the Rais live alongside the Tamangs or Sherpas who practice lamaistic Buddhism.

This is particularly so with the Thulungs as well as other northern Rais. The Rais living in the middle hills next to or among Hindu neighbour, are more influenced by Hinduism. But on closer observation, one can see that the outside influence is rather superficial, there is no deeper understanding of either the Buddhist or the Hindu religions, and the heart of the Rai is still with their own age-old practices and traditions of worshipping deities believed to be living in the jungles, on mountains, rivers, in the house and particularly in the hearth, etc. The Nagi rite is performed regularly according to the season. Nagi, the water serpent, is considered a public deity for the Rai and there are special priests who perform the rites either for a single household or for a whole village. Purbe, the household deity is kept inside the house, usually in a corner of the house away from the entrance. These gods are not images or idols, but spirits, kept in earthern pots. Bhume rites are observed in spring and fall. These are communal rites and everyone's participation is extremely important. These are rites to ensure fertile fields for the individual as well as the community as a whole. Thus, during the Bhume of Waas festival[10], every household has its own ceremony beside the communal ceremony. This spring festival is especially important; it is the only time of the year, apart from the time of the Hindu festival of Dasain, when all work stops for several days.

During the Hindu festival of Dasain, Hindu rites are performed conforming to certain rites of the prestigous religion of the country. The Rais have incorporated specific Rai customs in this festival, for example, a married couple must visit the wife's brothers with a gift of liquor and receive a blessing from them.

For each of the Rai rites and ceremonies, there is a particular officiant or priest. The priest also changes according to the kind of ceremony being performed. Mainly, there are two kinds of priests : one for general religious functions, and one for the task of healing the sick. This healer who can be a non-Rai, or even a Hindu (but not a Brahmin), may act as a kind ol medicine man. The healer is also called 'shaman', or 'dhami' in Nepali. Such a shaman receives spiritual training from a teacher. Healing is done by propitiating spirits on behalf of the sick people. Both priests and shamans are given gifts in kind or money.

Some Rais also worship Hindu gods, and some Rais may even be priests for such occasions, but usually, a Brahmin is called to recite the sacred texts. This kind of religious performance is mainly ordered by former Gurkha soldiers who have been away from Rai culture for some time, or by Rais who for other reasons live outside the Rai area proper. The degree to which such Rais have accepted Hinduism is reflected by the degree of sophistication shown in the ceremony. Some of these Rais have adopted all the Hindu ceremonies relating to the life cycle. The Khaling and the Kulung Rais, however, seldom call in a Brahmin for any ceremony.

□

Chapter 3

Birth Rites

3.1 General Remarks

All over the world, human beings share basic experiences related to family life. Some occasions are in themselves deemed happy, such as the birth of a healthy baby, or a marriage. Other occasions are by their very nature sad, such as the death of a family member, or of anyone who was part of the community. Yet while the experiences are the same, the importance given to them, or the way they are marked, is quite different with different peoples and cultures. There have also been changes in the various rituals over the thousands of years they have been practiced. In this chapter we will look into the details concerning the birth of a Rai child.

3.2 Birth

The birth of a Rai child takes place in the house of the husband, infrequently in the house of the wife's parents. Also, because of the fair distribution of work in Rai households, a woman generally looks after the livestock. If she goes into labour at this time, the birth is likely to take place in the shed where the person in charge of the grazing livestock stays. If such is the case, the new mother will go home to her husband's house next morning with her new baby.

Some women seek the help of an experienced woman, but there are no recognized midwives. If the husband is around, he helps with the preparation for the delivery (e. g, it is his job to make a cradle or repair the one used by older siblings), but he leaves the place before the actual birth take place. He may then come back to cut the umbilical cord, but generally, the mother cuts it herself. The mother also disposes of the afterbirth herself. The Khaling Rai keep the umbilical cord in a tree near the house and later it is used as a lucky charm. The Athpaharia Rai bury it in a nearby field (Dahal, 1985:86). Bantawa Rai keep it in a bamboo cane.

A newborn infant is wrapped in old skirts of the mother and kept close by her. As a general characteristic, we may say that there are no specific rites for birth itself[11]. Birth is considered by the Rais as a strictly biological and natural event. There are no chants during labour, no prescribed methods and no particular place for the delivery. There are certain times which are considered auspicious, but overall, the birth is not in itself a ceremonial event.

For a period of four days after the delivery the mother and the house in which delivery took place are considered ritually unclean. The new mother must not cook, neither for herself nor for others. She is supposed to rest and not leave the small area allotted to her and the new baby in the rear portion of the house. Nobody except the newborn infant may touch her. She is given especially nourishing food prepared by female relatives. No persons outside the immediate family members are permitted to enter the house, and the area allotted to the new mother and child may not be visited by any male family member.

3.3 Purification Ceremony

On the fourth day after birth a purification rite is performed. On this occasion the family members of both parents are expected to attend. Each household represented brings a chicken and some beer. The new mother washes all her clothes and cleans the area inside the house which she and her newborn infant had occupied. A priest is summoned for the occasion and performs the rite of 'lifting up the heads' of mother and child. This is to exorcise any evil spirit which may have been present at the time of birth. Among the Bantawa Rai, the house is purified by sprinkling water with the leaves of a certain plant all over the house. Later, a feast is given and all the people present at the rite participate.

After the ceremony of the 'lifting up the heads' there are no more restrictions on outsiders entering the house. The mother, however, cannot cook the meals for the family nor sit anywhere inside the house except in her specified area, nor can anyone other than the mother and the infant occupy that place for four more days. On the eighth day after confinement, this special area is again cleansed by the mother who also again washes all her clothes. After this, without any further ritual proceedings, all restrictions are lifted.

3.4 Name-giving Ceremony

This ceremony is performed on the third day after birth for a daughter and on the fourth day for a son by the Athpaharia Rai (Dahal, 1985:84). Other Rais do not make any distinction concerning the number of days. The Kulung Rai perform no special ceremony for name-giving as the infant is named on the purification ceremony itself. There are no particular rules as to who has the decisive voice in the name-giving. Even so, the given name is seldom used by family members but rather the children are called by rank names, e.g. 'Jetha', eldest son; 'Jethi', eldest daughter. 'Maila', second son; 'Maili', second daughter; and so on. Moreover, among friends and acquaintances, nicknames are commonly used and often an adult is exclusively referred to and addressed by this nickname. Again, there is no specific person who would be entitled to suggest such a nickname, rather someone with a strong enough personality and an interest and liking for the person to be named will find a name and everybody starts using it. The general time to acquire a nickname is as a teenager; for some popular boys or children of popular parents, it may be even in childhood.

Besides this casual approach to name-giving, there are also an increasing number of Rais who follow Hindu customs and invite a Brahmin (or a shaman) to find a name according to the horoscope of the child. Such names follow the commonly used Nepali names. They may be any of the followingr

names of gods : Indra, Durga, Krishna, Rudra, Shiva, Vishnu, etc.
martial : Rhandhoj (champion of war), and especially as the second name, Bahadur (brave).
legendary : Bhim Bahadur.
astrological : Tula (scales), Kumbhasing (water carrier).
birthdays : Tika (burn on Tikaday).
weekdays : Aitabir (born on Sunday), Sombahadur (born on Monday).
quality : Prem (love), Shanta (peace).

The Athpaharia Rai have a special name giving ceremony. It seems to follow Hindu customs to a large extent. In this ceremony, first the verandah of the house is smeared with cowdung. Then cow's urine is sprinkled all over the house and the family members also purify themselves sprinkling cow's urine on themselves. The person who had cut the umbilical cord of the newborn child is invited. She bathes mother and child and rubs mustard oil on them (Dahal, 1985:85). Many northern Rais do not know such a ceremony, a fact which points to the Hinduization of the Athpaharia Rai.

3.5 Rice-eating Ceremony

The Athpaharia and Bantawa have a special rice eating ceremony similar to the general Hindu custom. The northern Rai groups (e. g. Khaling, Kulung, Mewahang) do not have such a ceremony as they are considerably less Hinduized. Also, for them rice is by no means their main staple and thus symbolic for any type of solid food, but they have a variety of cereals (e.g. millet, corn, buckwheat, wheat).

The rice-eating ceremony is a happy occasion and is celebrated when the daughter is five months old, or a son is six months old. All relatives are invited, as well as friends and neighbors. A variety of dishes are prepared. A special dish, rice cooked in milk, is prepared for the child. Before feeding this to the child, the father puts a tika mark of uncooked rice mixed with curd on the forehead of the child and gives him or her one rupee. All the relatives also put a similar tika mark on the child's forehead and give presents. In addition to rice cooked in milk, other soft food, including curds and meat, are also fed to the child. All who were invited partake of the feast prepared for the occasion.

3.6 Hair-cutting Ceremony

As a son turns three years old, he will have his first hair-cut. This ceremonial act is performed by a maternal uncle. Again, as with the rice eating ceremony, this is not an original custom with the Rais. To this day, it is not at all common among the northern Rais, but it is more popular with the southern Rais (e.g. Athpaharia, Chamling, Bantawa)who are more Hinduized because they live among Hindu neighbours, whereas the northern Rais mostly live in exclusive villages. Even among the northern Rais, some of the former Gurkha soldiers tend to adopt this ceremony. But then it is much less elaborate than among the southern Rai groups.

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Chapter 4

Marriage Rites

4.1 General Remarks

Marriage is one of the earliest social institutions. Indeed, the institution of marriage is a central features in all forms of human society. Rites of marriage are observed in every human society. These rites vary from the extremely elaborate to those of the utmost simplicity. The ceremony may be a religious or a secular event. Sub-classes of rites of marriage, named and unnamed, exist in many societies. They may begin with ceremonies of betrothal that require complex formalities of transfer and exchange of goods, which are often regarded as compensation to the bride's kin group for their loss of the bride. Dramatic ceremonies of capture of the bride by the bridegroom and his relatives and friends are common in both preliterate and literate societies. Marriage ceremonies often include clearly visible insignias of the new social status, in such forms as wedding rings, distinctive garments or hair styles, and other ornaments.

Marrige ceremonies may be seen as especially emphasizing social bonds between husband and wife and their kin groups. In most societies and in most of human history, romantic love has not been the means by which spouses are selected. Social custom has limited marriage among certain classes of people.

Marriage rites place a very powerful sanction on marriage unions and thus enable them to serve as both a means to conducting an orderly and satisfying human life, and also as a means to maintaining an orderly society.

A general correlation may be seen between the degree of elaboration of marriage rites and social importance of enduring marriages in the society in question. In some of the large, industrial nations of the world, marriage rites are often simple, and sometimes secular, but a host of other sanctions operate in place of elaborate ceremonies to foster lasting unions.

4.2 Rai Courtship

By the time boys and girls of the Rai ethnic groups reach marrigeable age they would have met virtually all the eligible partners within a fairly wide area. and have spent some leisure time together with most of them. Rai boys and girls often have singing repartees. They exchange extemporaneously composed verses of song in a Rai language or in Nepali, each verse being a response to that just sung by the opposite singer. The verses generally describe the situation of the boy and the girl and their attraction or otherwise to each other. often with references to the immediate surroundings and the occasion which brought them together. Until recently, these singing contests, usually taking place at local markets and festivals, were a common way of meeting and selecting the future spouse. Many marriages were decided this way. and it was the most common way of obtaining a bride.

4.3 Conditions of Match-making

Marrige among the Rais, particularly among the Khaling and Kulung, may not be arranged between kin of the same patrilineal clan before a gap of seven generations. If a marrige within seven generations occurs, that marriage precipitates a clan fission, resulting in two separate and distinct clans, where previously there was only one. The two units thereafter are permitted to exchange brides in the normal way. Marriage between members of the same clan is called /hadphora/, 'breaking apart the bones'. The bones represent the patrilineal clan. Marriage is also prohibited between persons who can trace uterine relationship (i. e. related through the same mother, not the same father) of less than three generations. Marriage between those so related is called /dudhphora/, 'breaking the milk'. The milk represents the mother's clan before marriage. This proscription removes not only primary, but also secondary cross-cousins from the category of potential spouses. Marriage is thus forbidden between consanguineal relatives, be they agnates or cognates, unless the relationship possible to be traced is a distant one, removed by more than seven generations in the case of the father's kin and more than three in the case of the mother's kin.

4.4 Types of Marriage

There are three types of marriage. The first type may be translated as 'arranged marriage', which is considered the most prestigious. The second type is called 'marriage by fine payment', which involves absconding with another man's wife. A fine is subsequently paid to the former husband as compensation. The third type of marriage is called 'marriage by force', in which case an unmarried girl is abducted.

4.4.1 Arranged Marriage[12]

4.4.1.1 Request

When a boy's parents decide on a girl as a match for their son they may contact one of the following three people in order to act as their representative : mother's brother, mother's father's sister's husband, or mother's elder sister's husband. The choice is made on the basis of who the family thinks will be best suited to present their case. Usually, the mother's brother would be choosen to become the intermediary or go-between. He takes some liquor provided by the boy's parents and pays a visit the parents of the girl. He puts up the proposal and discusses the details with them. If the girl's parents like the proposal, the girl is immediately called and asked whether she would like to be married to the boy. If she is unwilling, some attempt would be made to change her mind. The family's refusal is signified when they do not drink the liquor sent by the boy's family, which is then returned untouched. Occasionally, the girl's parents and brothers override her objections and give their consent to the match, if they especially favour the marriage and feel confident that it will be an eventual success in spite of her unwillingness at the time. In such cases, a girl may be married without her consent; she is informed of the time of the marriage only at the last minute. On the boy's side, if the boy's family wishes to go ahead with the marriage regardless of the girl's unwillingness then the marriage is agreed upon. The boy's parents, however, would consent to such a marriage at their own risk. The first visit to the girl's family is known as 'the request'. When the representative from the boy's family returns with a favourable answer, the boy's family goes ahead with their marriage preparation.

After some time, the representative is once more sent with liquor to the girl's family in order to decide on the date for the initial rites. The couple are considered to be formally engaged from this second acceptance of liquor. In addition to the prescribed liquor, a personal gift is also sent to the bride to be by the groom. The gift consists of some cash, together with some vermillion powder and a few betel nuts, all put in a small bag, which the bride keeps among her personal possessions. The girl's acceptance of this gift is one of the most important part of the preliminary marriage proceedings. If divorce occurs later, this personal gift must be returned.

4.4.1.2 Initial marriage rites

The Rais have both an initial and final marriage ceremony. In the initial ceremony, both the boy's and the girl's families make a point to specially invite close relatives and particular friends. Guests are expected to bring gifts of liquor. The bride's party and the groom's party assemble at their respective houses where a large quantity of beer has been prepared beforehand.

The relatives of the bridegroom go to the bride's house to bring the bride. The groom is expected to give the bride a coin necklace as well as a gold nose-ring and a a nose-stud, and some even give silver earrings, which resemble small round shields. The groom selects a 'best man' who stands by him during the various phases of the ceremony. Likewise the bride chooses 'bridesmaids' to help her. When the groom presents the jewellry, the bridesmaids immediately decorate the bride with these ornaments.

An important part of the initial marriage rite is called 'the changing of the relationship' ceremony. The groom's relationship to each of the people in the bride's family has changed by virtue of the marriage and he must now formally salute his new relatives with the terms of address and greetings appropriate to the new relationship. In turn he must be addressed and greeted by them in the manner prescribed. The relationship of the bride to her family and clansmen has not changed, of course, and she addresses and salutes them in the usual manner. During this ceremony the bride and the groom move around the room in a clockwise direction.

Then the groom's party escorts the bride to the groom's house. The bride's parents and brothers do not accompany them. At the groom's house, the groom's party rejoins the people who had remained there while the bride was being fetched, and there is a feast. There would be a large gathering at the groom's house, while at the bride's house the gathering would be limited to clansmen and close relatives.

The next day, after further feasting, the bride is dressed in new clothes, and wears the ornaments given by the groom. During the middle of the day the groom's party, including the members of the groom's family, go to the bride's home.

This procession is led by the go-between, who is followed in order by the village elders, a band of musicians of the tailor caste, the bride and the groom, the best man and the bridesmaids, and the remainder of the party. They must take a number of traditionally stipulated items : a gourd container and a large earthen vessel, both of which are filled with beer, two large wooden containers and a single bottle, all full of liquor, a leg of pork; and twelve manas (a Nepali measurement of volume) of millet flour, or of roughly ground corn. The party enters the bride's home, where a gathering larger than that of the previous evening would be awaiting them. They are seated on the lower side of the house, and the close agnates of the bride occupy the upper section. The bride and her bridesmaids sit on one side, and the groom and his best man are escorted there, and they sit down on the mat beside the bride.

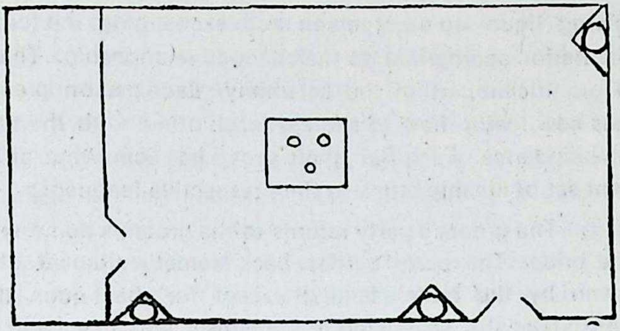

Diagram of the First Floor of a Typical Rai House
Figure 2

Homemade beer, provided by the bride's village, is served to the people and there are a few speeches on the appropriateness of the match, and there is well-wishing for the couple. First the bride, then the groom present bowls of liquor to each other. This liquor, which has been provided by the groom's family, is then given to the members of the bride's family, then to her clansmen, and, finally, to her other relatives. The members of the groom's family hold the bowl to each recipient's lips and tilt the bowl with their own hands as the liquor is consumed. A feast is then celebrated. After the meal, liquor is again served to the gathering. This time the liquor is provided by the bride's family.

At his point, there is also a more general 'changing of the relationship' ceremony. The bride and the groom move around the room in clockwise direction, ceremonially greeting each one of the guests. When they are finished inside the house, they go outside the house where people have been standing or seated nearby. The groom's parents, followed by his brothers and sisters also perform the 'changing of the relationship' ceremony with the members of the bride's family and her clansmen and close relatives, giving liquor to each person and exchanging the formal salutation appropriate to the changed relationship. This is a significant part of the ceremony. Each person present has now learnt how to address each other with the right kinship terms. Each Rai ethnic group has somewhat different set of kinship terms in their respective languages.

The groom's party returns to the groom's home with the bride. The party carries back some reciprocal gifts given by the bride's family; except for the liquor, this consists of the same kind of foodstuffs and beverages as was given by the groom's family earlier. The members of the bride's family do not go to the groom's house. There is no 'changing of the relationship' ceremony at the groom's home. Most of the groom's family guests stay the night and disperse the next morning after a final meal.

4.4.1.3 Final marriage rites

Three to five years often pass before the final rite of marriage is performed. By this time children would have been born to the couple. It is up to the husband to approach his wife's family to request that the final marriage rite be performed; only if they agree can it take place. Economic factors have a bearing on how long the rite is delayed. A complete set of eight (or seven, depending on Rai sub-tribe) copper vessels is required for presentation by the husband to the wife's natal family. The cost of these is more than Rs. 2000. There are also a number of other gifts of lesser value that he will have to provide. The wife's brothers are expected to give a dowry to her within a year or so of receiving the above-mentioned presents from the husband. The amount of dowry is not negotiated; rather, it depends on the bride's brothers, who decide upon the amount in accordance with traditional custom. The formal sanction of the headman of the wife's natal clan must be obtained before the final rite of marriage.

Even though a number of features are merely duplicated, the ceremonial aspect of the final rite of marriage is a bit more elaborate than that of the initial rite. What really distinguishes the final rite from the initial one is the comprehensive system of gift offering involved in the final rite.

The most popular time for wedding is the period between January and May. Upon consulting a calender which lists auspicious dates, the date of the final marriage rite is set. The husband then approaches his close relatives, the members of his clan, neighbours, and special friends for contributions. All members of the wife's clan are required to donate one mana of grain to her natal family for preparing beer to be served to guests.

After he has paid the brideprice, the husband must give a twenty-five paisa gift to each householder of her local clan group The required amount is given to those members of the clan group who will oversee the distribution. Likewise, a cash gift of ten paisa must be given to the wife of each recipient of the above mentioned gift. Other clan members also receive a cash gift of five paisa.

For the final rite, four go-betweens are required: two for the husband's side and two for the wife's. On the wife's side, one would be the wife's uncle and the other must also be a member of her clan segment. On the husband's side, one must belong to his clan segment, but the other need not be related to him. They are chosen for their experience and knowledge of the custom. The husband gives one mohar (fifty paisa) to each of the four go-betweens.

The final marriage ceremony focuses on the visit by the new husband's party to his wife's home. This time, instead of the groom coming to take the bride as in the initial rite, the husband, accompanies his wife to her family home to pay the brideprice to her family. The wife wears a red sari and a red head covering and applies vermillion powder to her hair-partition. The husband wears white clothes and carries a colourful umbrella. The husband's party gather beforehand and partakes of a feast at his house. They then from a procession led by his two go-betweens and proceed to the wife's natal home. They carry the following gifts to her family : one ceremonial gourd and one large earthern pot, both full of beer, two large wooden vessels filled with liquor, a leg of pork, and twenty-four manas of grain. The party normally arrives at the wife's natal home in the afternoon and stays there overnight.

They are met outside the house by the go-betweens of the wife's group. The two parties ceremonially greet each other, and their respective go-betweens tilt bowls of liquor to each others lips. Entering the house, the husband's party is seated on the lower side, and the wife's party occupies the upper section of the main room. (See Figure 2 p. 29)

A ceremony involving the pouring of libations of beer on the sacred hearthstones and on the altar is performed by the senior most male of the wife's clan. He uses the ceremonial gourd of beer provided by the bride's family. Afterwards the wife's clan serves beer, a meal, and liquor to the gathering. Later in the evening. the husband pays the brideprice to his wife's family, at which time the rite of pouring libations of beer on the sacred hearthstones and on the altar is repeated. This time, however, the ceremonial gourd of beer which has been provided by the husband is used. After the brideprice is paid, speeches are made by the go-betweens and other persons represnting the two sides. The following statement is made by the members of the husband's clan to the members of the wife's clan in the local Rai language :

> "The groom has brought the brideprice and given it to you. You, in turn, have given your daughter. Enjoy the price which has been paid and be happy."

The men of the husband's clan say to the new wife :

> "The groom has given the price for you. Now he alone has rights over you. Live happily with your husband and with your in-laws."

After the speeches are concluded there is an exchange of songs between the two sides in Rai language. It goes something like this :

"The price has been given. aw, aw, aw.
It is a good price. eh eh, eh.
We have had a good wedding. aw, aw, aw.
May husband and wife live hapily. eh, eh, eh ..."

The song exchange lasts for an hour. Singers keep on repeating niceties and words of blessings for the couple as well as for their children.

After the ritual exchange of song, the 'changing of the relationship' ceremony is again held. Each person present greets the others present using the appropriate new kinship terms and from now on these newly related people address each other with these kinship terms. A failure to use the correct kinship terminology in any greeting prevents a conversation from developing. The importance of this ceremony for the Rais cannot be over-emphasized. The husband's party returns to the husband's house after this 'changing of the relationship' ceremony.

A year or so later, having received the brideprice, the wife's family must pay the dowry. Although separated from the presentation of brideprice by a gap in time, the reciprocal presentation of dowry should nonetheless be considered a part of the final rite of marriage. The dowry is intended for the benefit of the children of the union, especially the sons. This dowry practice is quite different from those prevalent in India and elsewhere.

The final rite of marriage has three important aspects. The first is that it transfers responsibility for, and jural and ritual authority over the newly married woman from her natal family to her husband. Secondly, it fully establishes the legitimacy of the children of the union, both those born before and those born after the ceremony itself. Thirdly, these jural bonds of marriage can not be broken; divorce is now impossible.

Having considered the most formal marriage, that is, the arranged marriage, let us now see two other types of marriage : 'marriage by fine payment' and 'marriage by force'.

4.4.2 Marriage by fine payment

The men who are not previously married may also obtain wives by running off with a married woman. When it is realized that a newly married woman continues to reside at her natal home for an indefinite period, and that such women still join the noctural gatherings of youths, it will be seen that the opportunities for reaching an understanding with a young, married woman are not inconsiderable, especially if the latter is not particularly happy with her husband.

If a married woman who has eloped with a new man keeps the jewelry and ornaments given by the original husband, this original husband must be compensated double the cost of jewelry gifted by him. This is the normal practice. The interesting point in this is that only half the compensation need be paid by the new husband The other half is paid by the woman's natal family, if her final rite of marriage to her former husband has not been completed, thus making the woman's natal family jurally responsible for her acts of commission and omission. The new husband's expense for jewelry and ornaments would be roughly the same as in a normal marriage, because the woman keeps the jewelry she has and he himself is fined only the equivalent of their value. Where he really saves is on the entertaining and feasting of guests, a tremendous expense in the case of a 'arranged, negotiated marriage', but negligible in a 'marriage by fine payment'. In a 'marriage by fine' union the 'changing of relationship' ceremony is held only between the immediate kin. This kind of marriage is mostly popular among poor people, and especially among men who have no father or elder brother. Characteristically, a young unmarried man usually absconds with a woman who is married but has not yet joined her husband, or if she has, has done so only recently.

4 4.3 Marriage by Force

In marriage by force an unmarried girl is abducted This kind of marriage is common among widowers and men whose wives have deserted them. The man, together with some of his friends, seizes a girl, who may give a show of resistance, and conducts her to his house. After arrival at her captor's home, she is given beer and a meal, the consumption of which signifies her consent to the marriage She also receives jewelry and ornaments. At this stage of the proceedings her brothers probably arrive on the scene to find out if she is really willing or not. If she is willing, the couple subsequently visit her natal home; the 'changing of relationship' ceremony is performed among the close kin of the couple, and this satisfies the requirements for jural recognition of the union Whether or not the girl agrees to the marriage, her abductor must pay a fine to her family as damages for having flouted their authority over her marital destiny. The total expenses in such marriages are considerably less than in an 'arranged marriage' but somewhat higher than in 'marriage by fine payment'.

Not only unmarried girls but also young widows are frequently captured for marriage. Marriage by capture is less commonly practiced for obtaining a first wife. than by widowers and deserted husbands for obtaining a new spouse. It isnot commonly practiced nowadays among the Rais.

4.5 Divorce

Divorce, in the western sense, denotes the dissolution of a valid marriage while both partners are still alive. After a divorce, both partners are free to remarry. But among the Rais, divorce has a different meaning. It is the formal severing of the jurally recognized tentative bond of marriage established by the initial rite. Thus, divorce is possible at any time prior to the final rite of marriage. But after the final rite, divorce is not possible.

Divorce is easy and common in the initial phase when husband and wife still live separately. It is less frequent after the couple begin to live together. In most cases, termination of the union is due to the establishment of a liasion with another partner by one of the spouses, usually the wife. A husband seldom divorces his wife; if he does, he loses all the gifts (such as gold ornaments and clothes) that he gave to her at the initial marriage rite. There is no ritual involved in divorce. All that needs to be resolved is the question of ownership of the gifts given and received.

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Chapter 5

Death Rites

5.1 General Remarks

Most human societies have beliefs in souls, spirits, or an afterlife of some sort. Special rituals are generally performed when people die. Like other rites of passage, these death rituals vary greatly, but they do have certain elements in common. All attention centers upon the deceased and upon the bereaved. The disposal of the body of the deceased is also usually a focus of these rites. This may be done by cremation, burial in a cemetery, natural decomposition and later burying of the bones, or mummification. In Nepal, cremation and burial are common. Among some Tibetans on the northern borders of the Himalayan highlands, however, an uncommon practice is recorded: the corpse is dismembered and the parts put out for the vultures. This practice is thought to ease the transfer of the deceased into the afterlife. Often special symbolic attention is given to make the soul of the deceased enter the spirit world. In societies where the souls of the dead are considered potentially malevolent, special ritual measures are taken to safeguard the living.

Ritual attention is also given to the bereaved, who at this time must observe many special rules of behaviour. The bereaved are isolated from other members of society and prohibited from participating in many normal activities.

These and other features of death rites underline the transition the bereaved is undergoing. Often grief is dramatized at the climax of the ceremonies by weeping and wailing. The final ceremony symbolically instruct the bereaved to set excessive grief behind them and return to normal social life. More than other rites of passage, death ceremonies are closely identified with religion, and many of these rites have explicit religious aims such as inducing the soul of the deceased to enter the spirit world, or the safeguarding of the living from malevolent spirits straying from the way to the spirit world. The assurance of continuation of existence in an afterlife, in which the deceased in some measure continue to be members of living societies, is less common among the Rais.

The following section gives a description of the typical Rai funeral rites. The Rais perform two death rites. One rite is performed immediately after the death of a person; the other is performed about a month later.

5.2 Initial Funeral Rite

When a person belonging to the Rai community dies, his close kin and neighbours come to the house to help prepare the corpse for burial. The body is dressed in clean clothes. Then it is wrapped with a length of cloth, which is secured with a string. It is placed on a platform made of bamboo. The corpse has to be placed on the west side of the house with the head pointing the north. A set of arrows, a bow, and the typical Nepali knife are placed to the left of the corpse to protect it from evil spirits.

The funerary priest is called. During the ceremony, which is held in the house of the deceased, the priest addresses the deceased and explains to him that he is being put to rest. The priest ritually puts into the mouth of the dead a little beer. While this is being done, one of the priest's assistants kneels at the foot of the corpse and moves downwards through the air repeatedly with a knife and cries 'hut, hut, hut'. Another assistant, who is kneeling by the head and holding a bow and arrow, also cries 'hut, hut, hut'. While this is taking place, some of the relatives of the deceased prepare a grave in a nearby field. The field must be at a lower elevation than the house. A chicken is then killed and the blood is sprinkled on the grave site. The wings of the chicken are sent to the house and there, these are put under the armpits of the deceased. A hole is dug which is large enough to accomodate the corpse. The grave is dug in such a way that the head of the corpse when placed in it would be oriented toward a stream. The grave is lined on all four sides with large slabs of stone. Two other large, flat stones are prepared to be placed over the top of the grave.

Four men, barring the brothers-in-law of the deceased, pick up and carry the corpse to the grave site. The corpse must be taken out through the back door of the house. The corpse is laid in the grave, and two flat slabs cover the grave. The wife of the deceased, then the sister of the deceased, then his father, and finally each of those present throw a handful of earth on top of the grave. The women then file back across the field to the house. Before they enter the courtyard of the house, they must be ritually purified with a sprinkling of water. The men, who remain at the gravesite, build a roof over the grave, which consist of matting on top of a bamboo frame. A basket with a stick is placed on the roof and fastened there. A commemorative white flag is also placed at the grave site by the sisters of the deceased.

After completing their work at the grave site, the men wash themselves in an act of purification. Then they return to the house of the deceased and have a meal with beer and liquor. For about a month the deceased is honoured by food offering, suggesting that he or she is being remembered by relatives and friends. On the day following the death an offering of cooked grain, meat and beer is taken to the grave, and for a week or so such offerings are made. If the final death rite is performed long after the burial day, then the spirit of the deceased is invited to the house and is fed there. Food is set aside for the spirit of the deceased at the morning meal. At first the food is brought to the grave site, but later in the month, the food is set out in the house. In this way the presence of the spirit of the deceased is retained for the first month. Some relatives or friends may have been away from the village at the time of the death, in which case they would have an opportunity to pay their respects to the deceased during this period before the final funeral rite.

5.3 Final Funeral Rite

The date of the final rite is fixed by considering the day on which the person had died. If the death had occurred after the new moon the final rite would takes place one month later. If the death had occured after the full moon, the date is set about two weeks later. In other words, the final funeral rite is timed to take place just after the next new moon. Before the final death rite takes place, a number of restrictions must be observed by the next of kin. Accordingly, it is taboo to sing, or to give or receive formal greetings. On the day a person dies, all villagers must stop working in the field. Similar no-work restrictions must be observed on the day of the final rite and the following day.

On the day of the final death rite relatives and friends of the deceased come to the house of the dead with contributions of fermented grain to make beer. Some meat should be on hand; oftentimes dried meat is kept on hand for such ccasions. For the final rite, as with the first funeral rite, it is necessary to have a priest. The same priest performs both rites. The priest sits in the lower part of the main room of the house facing the hearth. He holds in his left hand a long bow and an arrow specially made for the occasion. In his right hand he holds a sickle and an arrow with iron head. Using the Rai ritual language, the priest instructs the deceased on the way to the land of the dead, and enjoins him to begin the journey. From time to time the priest simulates firing the arrow from the bow, shouting at the same time. This is to exhort the deceased spirit to depart. A ritual libation of beer is poured over the sacred hearthstones. This time it is done in a counter-clockwise direction, contrary to the normal practice at weddings and other ceremonies. The fillet for the deceased is roasted and beer is poured on it.

The final death rite for one who has had a normal death consists in the Rai priest conducting the dead spirit on the final journey. A person who dies an unnatural death (e. g. by falling off a cliff, or drowning in a river, or a woman who dies while pregnant) would not get the normal death rites, as such deaths are believed to produce ghosts. Instead burial takes place quickly, in the jungle, and a special ceremony is held to placate or ward off the spirit. In a normal death rite, however, the spirit is guided to the abode of the dead by the priest's chant. The priest verbally takes the spirit on a journey from the place where the deceased died to the abode of the dead. This jorney is a long one, and it is thought that the spirit of the deceased needs to stop and rest and take a cup of water at several waystations along the journey. The abode of the dead is the final stopping place for the deceased. Each waystation is called by its name. All of the waystations along the approach to the abode of the dead are geographical place-names within Nepal. The route to the abode of the dead leads from villages in the Rai territory through villages in the Sherpa land and from there to the final resting place. In this way the spirit is led to its destination where it will

९२६
डा. डिल्ली रमण रेग्मी
कल्याणी रेग्मी स्मारक
पुस्तकालय

rest permanently. But the priest who has verbally accompanied the spirit with his chant must return from the abode of the dead So the reverse order of place-names is chanted as he comes back. As the priest returns, he builds a verbal barrier at each of the waystations against the return of the spirit. When the priest again reaches the village, he stops chanting. Thus ends the escorting priest's journey to the abode of the dead.

The participants in the final death rite then leave the house to visit the grave where they make the final offerings of food and beer. Before the food is offered to the spirit of the deceased, the funeral party walks around the grave in a counter-clockwise direction. The white flag which was placed at the grave site when the burial took place is then cut. The sisters of the deceased, who had put up the flag as an expression of sisterly love for their brother, take down the flag respectfully. The flag is placed under the roof which covers the grave It is striking indeed that the last action of the funeral rite focuses on the relation between the brother and the sisters, giving final emphasis to their solidarity.

5.4 Death Memorial

The Rai people often construct a stone platform in memory of the deceased. This platform is called 'chautara' in Nepali. There is no Rai name for it. From this we may deduce that the practice of constructing a chautara is a recent one, which the Rai learned from other people. The practice may be of Indian origin as the word 'chautara' and its variants are found in Kumaoni, Bengali, Hindustani, and Punjabi languages. After the stone platform is constructed, a special stone memorial tablet, is placed on the platform. This memorial tablet usually has an inscription carved on it. The site selected for the chautara is always near a regular trail, and the stone platform is constructed as a resting place for people who pass by. In southern Rai villages, after the relatives of the deceased construct a stone chautara, they then plant bar and pipal trees to provide shade for people who travel on the road. In northern Rai villages, however, most chautaras do not have trees; instead a fireplace is constructed in front of the chautara for the use by travellers.

Construction of these memorials are believed to help the dead in the afterworld, while those in this world gain merit for the good deed. In addition to the cost of constructing the platform, the relatives of the deceased also bear the cost of providing a feast in memory of the dead. The following is an account of the construction, purification, and dedication of a chautara erected in remembrance of a Rai boy.

First stage : Some relatives and friends gathered together at the site where the chautara was to be built. They began by clearing the site and some stones lying around were used to build the platform. In a few hours the platform was ready for the memorial tablet to be placed on it. A small area of land in front of the platform was also cleared.

Second stage : More people came to the site and placed the central altar stone in the area cleared for the purification rite. Everyone acted with reverance as the leader killed a chicken and spinkled its blood on the altar stone. A tree sapling was planted beside the altar stone, and a bag of grains and some coins were hung on the tree. A fire was lit while the leader chanted some prayers in the local (Mewahang) Rai language He said something like this to the dead spirit.

'We are remembering you
Your memorial place is built here
Rest in peace......'

The father of the deceased cried.

Third stage: The one who had carved the inscription on the memorial tablet read the words aloud. The inscription was written in Nepali so that everyone who passes by will be able understand it. The tablet recorded the name of the deceased, and date of his death; the name of the one who bore the cost of the construction of the memorial, and the date of construction. After the ceremony a simple feast was given at the house of the deceased.

□

Chapter 6

Conclusions

6.1 General Remarks

If all societies in the world, preliterate and literate, are taken into account, the most commonly recurring rites of passage are those connected with normal but critical events in human life : birth, marriage, reproduction, and death. In this study we did not touch upon rites of passage held upon the attainment of physical maturity, that is, a kind of initiation ceremony, because the Rais do not seem to observe any such rite. However, further study and research may lead to the discovery of such a custom. There is a kind of initiation ceremony into shamanhood after a man has completed his apprenticeship, but it is beyond the scope of the present study, as it is not a part of every Rai's life.

Elaborate rites of passage are commonly rich in symbolism, and prominently include representation of the states of separation and transition and the new status after reincorporation. Most common among these markers of new status are alterations in and embellishments of visible parts of the body, distinctive garments and bodily decorations. We have seen this in marriage. The bride receives new clothes and jewelry from the groom and wears these during the ceremony.

As stated in chapter 1, this paper attempts to apply Van Gennep's classification of the function of rites of passage to those rites of passage extant in Rai culture. Let us now look at the various rites from this perspective.

6.2 Stages of Birth Rites

Although there are not many rites at childbirth, rites for the newborn focus on health and well-being. There appear to be no rites of passage which incorporate the newborn into society; rather his status is taken for granted.

Such rites as do occur in Rai culture at the time of birth are focussed on the mother. For several days after birth she is considered ritually unclean and isolated from contact with others. She may not go outside the house and outsiders may not enter the house; this corresponds nicely with Van Gennep's first stage in a rite of passage, which he calls 'separation'.

At the end of the separation stage a purification rite is held with a priest in attendance. This ceremony is known as the 'lifting up of the heads' and marks the beginning of the transition stage, according to Van Gennep's model. After this ceremony, outsiders may enter the house, but the mother herself still may not go outside.

After several days of this less restrictive confinement, the mother washes herself and all her clothes, and purifies the area of the house in which she was confined. After this she is reincorporated into the society in her new role of a mother.

6.3 Stages of Marriage Rites

Van Gennep discussed rites of passage in terms of three stages which he called 'separation', 'transition', and 'reincorporation'. Arranged marriages among the Rais, described in section 4.4.1, illustrate these. An arranged marriage begins with a request and an engagement. The engagement is usually widely announced in order to forestall any attempt at marriage by force. Thus engagement meets the criteria for the 'separation' stage.

The transition stage of the marriage rite begins with the initial marriage rite and centers on the 'changing of the relationship' ceremony. Only after this ceremony is completed does the bride accompany her husband to his house The transitional nature of this part of the rite is shown by the fact that the bride ceremonially returns to her home the next day. Although the bride does generally stay with her husband after the initial marriage rite, the marriage is not complete until the bride-price is paid and the final marriage rite held some years later.

The final marriage rite marks the reincorporation stage. At this time the new couple is confirmed in their roles as husband and wife, and the marriage is considered permanent. After the final marriage rite, divorce is impossible and it is unlikely that the wife will leave her husband for a 'marriage by fine payment' with another man. The couple is reincorporated into society as a new and complete social unit,

Arranged marriages in Rai culture best illustrate Van Gennep's three stages of rites of paseage. The other two types of marriage prevalent among the Rais, 'marriage by force' and 'marriage by fine payment', do not offer clear examples of this stages. It is, perhaps, no coincidence that arranged marriage is the most preferred type of marriage among the Rais.

6.4 Stages of Death Rites

Let us look at the death rites from the perspective of Van Gennep's classification. In Rai society, where the souls of the dead are feared as being potentially malevolent, special ritual measures are taken in the final death rites to safeguard the living. This is not the so-called worship of ancestors as in Japan or in China where the social affinity with the deceased is close. Special symbolic attention is given to aiding the soul of the deceased to enter the spirit world.

The first funeral rite and the burial of the dead symbolize the separation stage. Men dig a hole and the deceased is placed in it, covered with earth and sealed with a large stone. In this we see 'separation' of the dead from the living. At this time close relatives verbally bid good-bye to the dead.

The transition stage lasts from the burial until the final death rite is held. In this transition stage the deceased, though no longer physically present, is ritually fed. The transition stage culminates with the spirit of the deceased being escorted from the world of the living to the final abode of the dead.

In the last stage, the spirit of the deceased reaches the abode of the dead and stays there with its ancestors. In order to mark the permanence of this new state, the escorting priest builds verbal barriers against the return of the spirit at each of the waystations along the route as he reiurns. This, then, is the reincorporation stage.

6.5 Final Remarks

In all these rites of passage, we observe certain changes taking place over time. The old and typical rites are being replaced with new ones under the influence of the Hindu culture surrounding the Rai society. This summary, however, shows that Van Gennep's three elements distinguishable in the change of social status are still to be found in Rai rites of passage. Each of the major rites of passage has a clearly discernible separation, transition and reincorporation stage. If, as Van Gennep proposes, these stages of ritual exist in order to ease people through the often traumatic transition from one social status to another, then they have remarkable value in enabling people to adapt to new situations. It would indeed be a tragedy if the Rais were to lose their own adaptive practices because of outside pressures. Indeed, they should decide for themselves how their traditional rites of passage can best be fitted to suit modern circumstances.

□

Footnotes

1. For more information, see the following authors in the bibliography : Allen (1974-1981) on Thulung Rai; Dahal (1985) on Athpaharia Rai; Gaenzle (1983) on Mewahang Rai; Hardman (1981) on Lohorung Rai; McDougal (1973, 1979) on Kulung Rai; Tamura (1982) on Chamling Rai; Toba (1978-1984) on Khaling Rai.
2. There is great diversity in the traditional customs of the Rai sub-groups. As I could not cover the customs of all the Rais in this paper, I have tried to describe those my experience suggests are typical. Different sub-groups are known to have different customs, this will be noted either in the text or in footnotes.
3. Some even use 'kirat' (or 'kirant') as their family name. The word 'kirat' is not often used in this paper, except as a linguistic cover term, in order to avoid confusion. For further details see the discussion on the subject in Dahal (1975).
4. The following chapters describe certain rites of passage as typital Rai examples, they may be revised if more research time is available. It is my hope that researchers who are themselves Rais might write better from the insider's point of view. An outsider can only scratch the surface of this unique culture.
5. Some oral traditions relate that the Khaling Rai came up via Diktel in Khotang district. It is interesting to

note that the Sherpas have similar oral stories about the Khaling Rai (in which they are called the Kiranti Rai). T. R. Lama says,

> 'Shortly after Pazjin arrived in Khumbu, there was a fight between brothers of a Kiranti Rai family. One of them ran away from Panch Pokhari, over Amphu Lapsha and down to Dingboche, where he built a house. Eventually, he moved down to Donglhamzo (near Tengboche). After building many houses, the Rai moved back to his homeland. Now, just Sherpas live here.'

The Khaling Rai have their own Vanshavali (family chronicle) as well, for they state that Maape, one of the Khaling ancestors, married a Sherpa woman, but unfortunately she fell down from a cliff and died while pregnant. This was an inauspicious event, and since then no Khaling would ever take a Sherpa woman as a marriage partner.

6. Allen (1975:1) states that the Thulung Rai's ancestors lived in a village beside Maulung Khola and that their descendants moved north-east to their present location, about two days' journey away.

7. Lexico-statistical results (Glover, 1971:10). I cannot write about Kirati Kings although many have tried to prove historical facts concerning that period. See Vajracharya (1973). Vajracharya and Malla (1985) have also done much work to document the early history of Nepal.

8. For further details see diagram A.3 in the appendix. It shows the linguistic relationships between the various Kirati languages.

9. Formerly scholars thought of the various Rai speech varieties as dialects (Wolfenden, 1933a, 1933b, 1935a,

1935b). Currently, however, scholars agree that they are languages (Weidert and Subba, 1985:1).

10. Some Rai call this 'chandi naach' because this festival is celebrated by dancing in the manner of planting or harvesting.

11. Newars are said to have elaborate birth rites (Cech and Joshi, 1979).

12. This description is mainly based on observation among the Khaling and Kulung Rais. Other Rai groups might differ from this in certain aspects. Future study may add more information on the others. At present the readers would have to be content with what I have written here.

□

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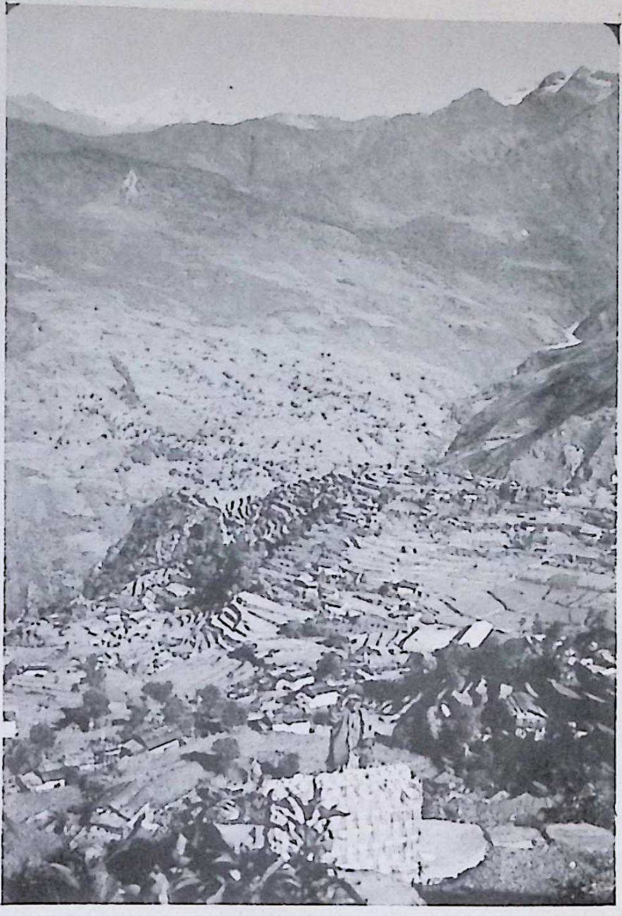
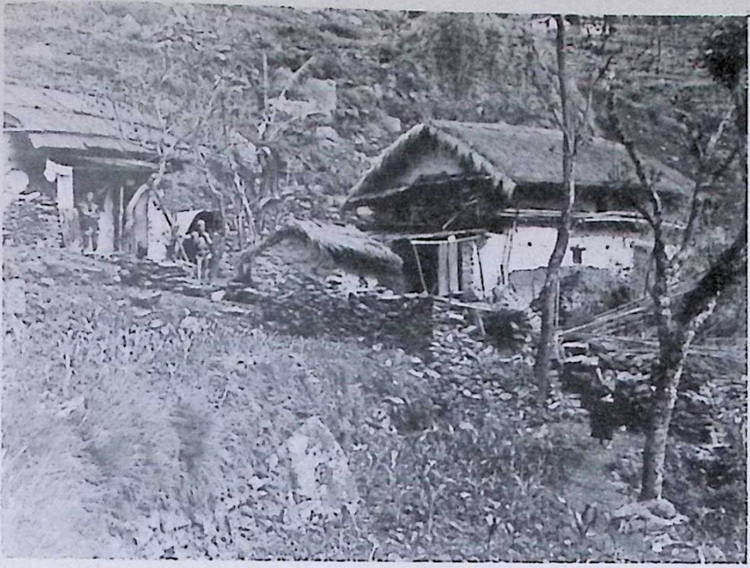
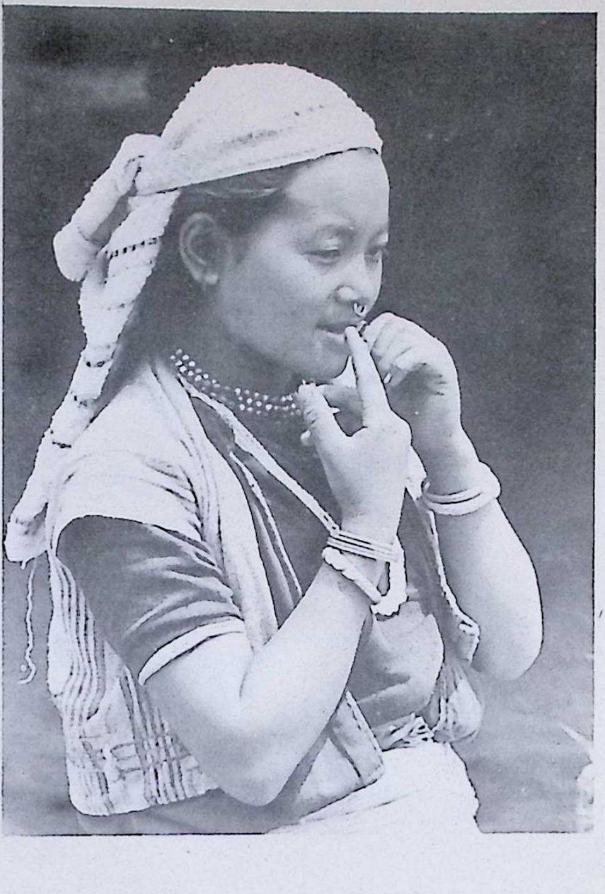


Gudel, a Kulung Rai village
in the Hongụ valley.

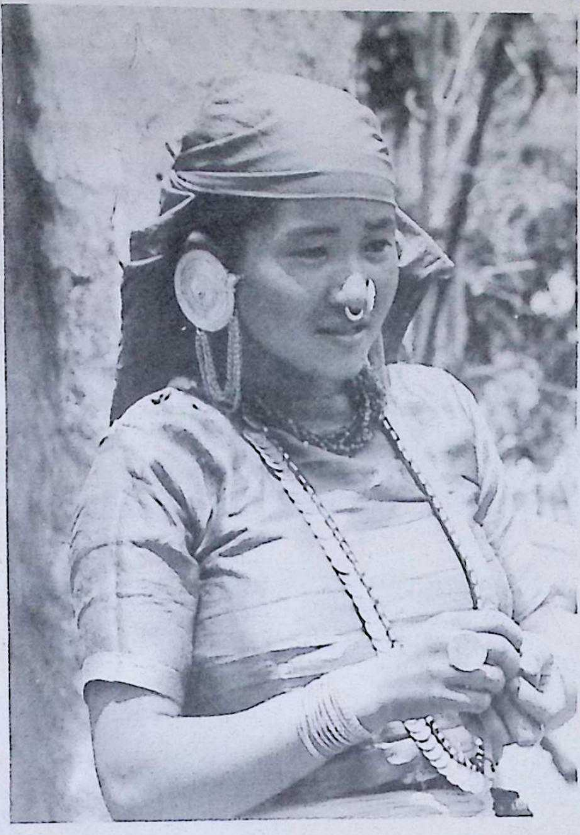


A typical Kulung Rai house.

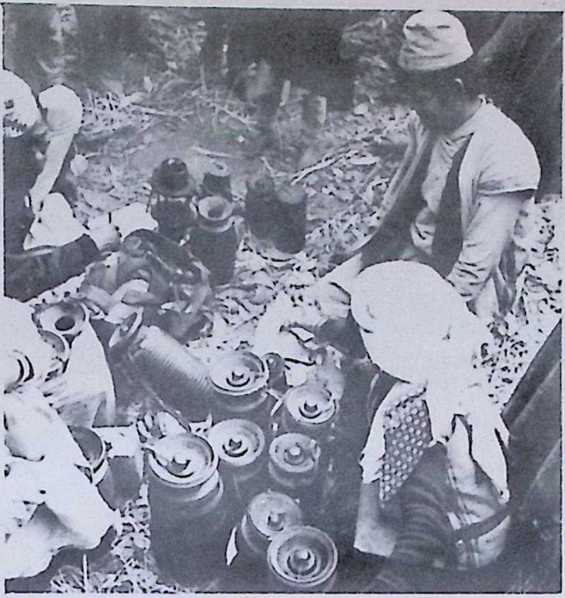
Mewahang Rai sitting on the stairs of his house.



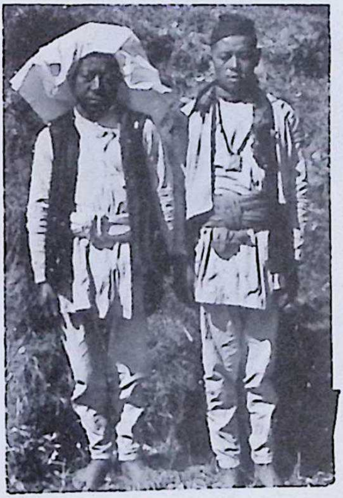
young Kulung Rai woman
in traditional dress.



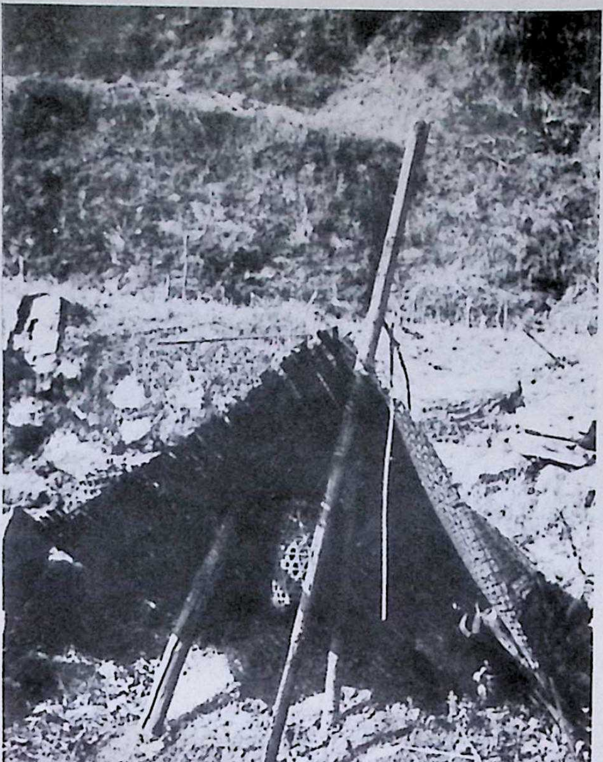
Kulung Rai woman with the jewelry she received on her wedding.



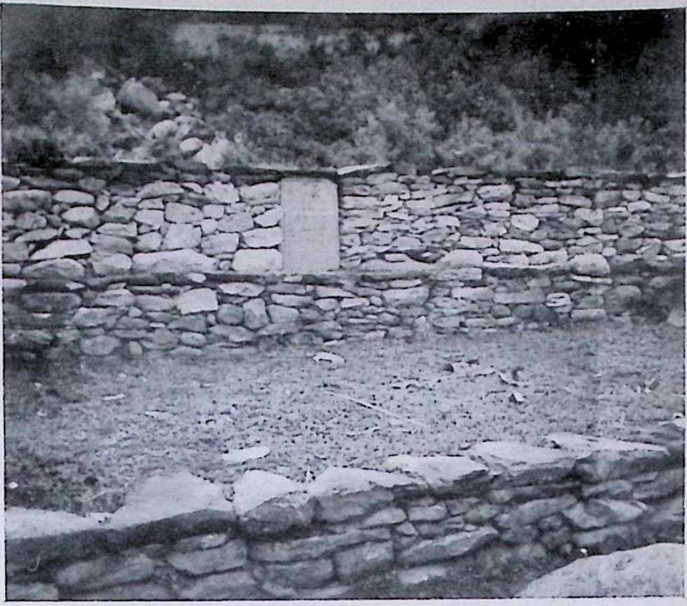
A Khaling Rai wedding gift of liquor to the bride's family from the bridegroom's clan.



Go-betweens for a Khaling Rai wedding match



A Khaling Rai grave site
(front view).



A completed chautara showing the memorial platform

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